

Psalm 102— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) as well as the Introduction to [Book I](#) and [Book IV](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the [Key to the charts](#).

Specific features of Psalm 102

- Psalm 102 showcases the compositional craftsmanship of its author. It is made up of **204** (12 x **17**) words, skilfully divided into **85** (5 x **17**) in the central Canto II (vs. 13-23), and **119** (7 x **17**) in the surrounding cantos (vs. 2-12 and 24-29).
- By means of his ingenious use of the direction of address, the author arranged the **204** words in such a way that the words explicitly addressed to God amount to **85** (5 x **17**), leaving **119** (7 x **17**) words in the rest of the prayer in the form of a monologue.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 2-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12 || 13-15, 16-18, 19-21, 22-23 || 24-26, 27-29 (10 strophes with 29 verselines and 60 cola, taking v. 27 as a tricolon).
- Fokkelman: 2-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16-18, 19-21, 22-23, 24-26, 27, 28-29 (11 strophes with 30 verselines and 61 cola, taking v. 27 as a separate strophe with 2 bicolic verselines).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words addressed to God; **d**: words spoken in his presence about him.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	תִּפְלֶה לְעֵי כִי־יִעֲטֶהָ [^]	4	4			
	וּלְפָנַי יִתְּנָה יִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׁיחוֹ:	4		4		
	Heading, v. 1	8	= 4	+ 4		
2	שְׁמֵעָה תִּפְלְתִי [^] 1	3	3		3	
	וּשְׁנֵעֵתִי אֵלֶיךָ תָּבוֹא:	3		3	3	
	Total, v. 2	6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
3	אֶל־תִּסְתַּר פְּנֶיךָ מִמְּנִי 2	4	4		4	
	בְּיוֹם צָר לִי	3	3		3	
	תִּטְהַר־אֵלַי אֲזַנְדָּה [^] 3	3	3		3	
	בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא מִהֵרָה עֲנֵנִי:	4		4	4	
	Total, v. 3	14	= 10	+ 4	= 14	+ 0
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-3	20	= 13	+ 7	= 20	+ 0
4	כִּי־כֹל בְּעֵשֶׂן יָמִי [^] 4	4	4			4
	וְעֲצָמוֹתַי כְּמוֹ־קֶדַח נִחְרוּ:	4		4		4
	Total, v. 4	8	= 4	+ 4	= 0	+ 8
5	הוֹפֶדֶה־כְּעֵשֶׂב וַיִּבֶשׁ לִבִּי [^] 5	4	4			4
	כִּי־שָׁכַחְתִּי מֵאֲכָל לֶחֶמִי:	4		4		4
	Total, v. 5	8	= 4	+ 4	= 0	+ 8
	Total, v. 2-5	36	= 21	+ 15	= 20	+ 16
6	מְקוֹל אֲנִחְתִּי [^] 6	2	2			2
	דְּבַקָּה עֲצָמֵי לִבִּישְׂרָי:	3		3		3
	Total, v. 6	5	= 2	+ 3	= 0	+ 5
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 4-6	21	= 10	+ 11	= 0	+ 21

7	דְּמִיתִי לְקֶאֱת מִדְּבָרָא־ הָיִיתִי כְּכֹס חֲרָבוֹת: Total, v. 7	7	3	3		3	
8	שָׁקַדְתִּי וְאַהֲיִדָּה־ כְּצַפּוֹר בּוֹרֵד עַל־גֹּגֹן: Total, v. 8 Total, v. 6-8 Total, v. 4-8 Total, v. 2-8	8	2	2		2	
9	כָּל־הַיּוֹם חָרַפְנִי אוֹיְבָי־ מִהוֹלְלֵי בֵּי נִשְׁבָּעוּ: Total, v. 9 Strophe 3 Total, v. 7-9 Total, v. 5-9	9	4	4		4	
10	כִּי־אֶפֶר כְּלֶחֶם אֶכְלֵתִי־ וְשָׁקַנִּי בְּבִכֵּי מִסְכָּתִי: Total, v. 10 Total, v. 7-10 Total, v. 4-10	10	4	4		4	
11	מִפְּנֵי־זַעַמָּה וְקִצְפָּה־ כִּי נִשְׁאַתְנִי וְתִשְׁלִיכֵנִי: Total, v. 11 Total, v. 8-11	11	3	3		3	
12	יָמֵי כְּצֹל נִטְוִי־ וְאָנִי כְּעֵשֶׂב אֵיבָשׁ: Total, v. 12 Strophe 4 Total, v. 10-12 Total, v. 9-12 Total, v. 4-12 Canto I Total, v. 2-12	12	3	3		3	
13	וְאַתָּה יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּשָּׁבֵא־ וְזָכַרְךָ לְדֹר וְדֹר: Total, v. 13 Total, v. 10-13	13	4	4		4	
14	אַתָּה תִּקּוּם תִּרְחֵם צִיּוֹן־ כִּי־עַת לְחַנּוּנָה כִּי־בֹא מוֹעֵד: Total, v. 14 Total, v. 13-14	14	4	4		4	
15	כִּי־רָצוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ אֶת־אֲבֹנֵיהָ־ וְאַתָּה עֲפָרָה יְדוּגְנִי: Middle verseline Middle words: 101+ 2 +101 Middle cola: 60 = 29 + 2 + 29 Strophe 5 Total, v. 13-15 Total, v. 6-15	15	5	5		5	
			3	3		3	
			8	5	3	8	0
			25	13	12	25	0
			68	34	34	31	37

16	* כבודו = 29 (11+2+6+4+6): [ה]	וייראו גוים את־שם ³ יהוה ^א וְכָל־מַלְכֵי הָאָרֶץ אֶת־כְּבוֹדוֹ [ה]	16	5	5	5	5
		Total, v. 16		5	5	5	5
		Total, v. 13-16		10	= 5 + 5	= 0 + 10	
17	כִּי־בָנָה ⁴ יהוה ^א צִיּוֹן ^א נִרְאָה בְּכְבוֹדוֹ:	17	4	4	4	4	4
		Total, v. 17		2	2	2	2
		Total, v. 14-17		6	= 4 + 2	= 0 + 6	
18	פָּנָה אֶל־תְּפִלַּת הָעֲרֵרָה ^א וְלֹא־בָזָה אֶת־תְּפִלָּתָם:	18	4	4	4	4	4
		Total, v. 18		4	4	4	4
		Total, v. 16-18		8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8	
		Total, v. 13-18		24	= 13 + 11	= 0 + 24	
19	הִכְתַּב זֹאת לְדוֹר אַחֲרוֹן ^א וְעַם נִבְרָא יִהְיֶה־לָּהּ [ה]:	19	4	4	4	4	4
		Total, v. 19		4	4	4	4
		Total, v. 16-19		8	= 4 + 4	= 0 + 8	
20	כִּי־הִשְׁקִיף מִמְרוֹם קִדְשׁוֹ ^א ⁵ יהוה ^א מְשֻׁמִּים אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַבַּיִט:	20	4	4	4	4	4
		Total, v. 20		5	5	5	5
		Total, v. 19-20		9	= 4 + 5	= 0 + 9	
		Total, v. 15-20		17	= 8 + 9	= 0 + 17	
21	לְשֹׁמֵעַ אֲנָקַת אֲסִירָה ^א לְפִתְחַ בְּנֵי תְּמוּתָהּ:	21	3	3	3	3	3
		Total, v. 21		3	3	3	3
		Total, v. 19-21		6	= 3 + 3	= 0 + 6	
22	לְסֹפֵר בְּצִיּוֹן שֵׁם ⁶ יהוה ^א וַתִּהְיֶה־לְתוֹ בִּירוּשָׁלַם:	22	4	4	4	4	4
		Total, v. 22		2	2	2	2
		Total, v. 19-22		6	= 4 + 2	= 0 + 6	
23	בְּהַקְבִּיץ עַמִּים יִחְדְּוּ ^א וּמִמְלָכוֹת לְעַבְדֹת־ ⁷ יהוה ^א :	23	3	3	3	3	3
		Total, v. 23		4	4	4	4
		Total, v. 22-23		7	= 3 + 4	= 0 + 7	
		Total, v. 19-23		13	= 7 + 6	= 0 + 13	
		Total, v. 16-23		36	= 18 + 18	= 0 + 36	
		Total, vs. 15-23		60	= 31 + 29	= 0 + 60	
		Canto II Total, v. 13-23		68	= 36 + 32	= 8 + 60	
				85	= 44 + 41	= 25 + 60	

24	עֲנֵה בְּדַרְךָ פְּחִי	24	3	3	3
	קִצֵּר יָמַי:		2	2	2
	Total, v. 24		5	= 5 + 0	= 0 + 5
25**	dittography אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי בְּחַצֵי יָמַי	25	5	5	4 1
	בְּדוֹר דְּוָרִים שְׁנוֹתָיִךְ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 25		8	= 5 + 3	= 7 + 1
	Total, v. 20-25		41	= 24 + 17	= 7 + 34
26	לְפָנַי הָאָרֶץ יִסְדָּתָֹ	26	3	3	3
	וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדִידָה שְׁמַיִם:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 26		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
	Strophe 9 Total, v. 24-26		19	= 13 + 6	= 13 + 6
27	הִמָּה יֹאבְדוּ וְאַתָּה תַעֲמֹד	27	4	2	2
	וְכָל־ם כְּבֹד־וּ יְבֹלֹֹ		3	3	3
	כְּלָבוֹשׁ תַחֲלִיפֶם וְיִחַלְפוּ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 27		10	= 7 + 3	= 10 + 0
28	וְאַתָּה־הוּאֹ	28	2	2	2
	וּשְׁנוֹתָיִךְ לֹא יִתְמוּ:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 28		5	= 2 + 3	= 5 + 0
	Total, v. 25-28		29	= 17 + 12	= 28 + 1
	Total, v. 24-28		34	= 22 + 12	= 28 + 6
29	בְּנִי־עֲבֹדֶיךָ יִשְׁכֹּנוֹּ	29	3	3	3
	וְזָרְעֶם לְפָנֶיךָ יִכּוֹן:		3	3	3
	Total, v. 29		6	= 3 + 3	= 6 + 0
	Strophe 10 Total, v. 27-29		21	= 12 + 9	= 21 + 0
	Total, v. 25-29		35	= 20 + 15	= 34 + 1
	Canto III Total, v. 24-29		40	= 25 + 15	= 34 + 6
	Total, v. 13-29		125	= 69 + 56	= 59 + 66
	Total, v. 2-29		204	= 111 + 93	= 85 + 119
	With the heading, total, v. 1-29		212	= 115 + 97	

* In v. 16b, with 4QPsb, I read כְּבוֹדֶי, 'his glory', instead of כְּבוֹדְךָ, 'your glory', which the 3rd person context clearly demands - cf. v. 17b. The numerical value of כְּבוֹדֶי happens to be 29 (11 + 2 + 6 + 4 + 6) and may be considered a keyword - see Observation 1 below.

** In MT the words אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי, 'I say: "My God"', (v. 25a), are problematic. The LXX understood the words as אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי, 'He said to me', which tempted scholars to relocate the two words at the end of v. 24: 'The brevity of my days He has announced me' – see also 4QPs^b and cf. P.W. Skehan, *CBQ* 26 (1964), p. 316. This makeshift solution to the problem is far from satisfactory.

In my judgement, there is a much better and simpler solution by taking the word אֱלֹהֵי as an obvious case of dittography of the very next word אֵל. V. 25a now runs: 'I say: "Do not take me away in the midst of my days."' Compare e.g., the Revised English Bible, which rightly disregards the word אֱלֹהֵי: "Do not carry me off before half my days are done."

It stands to reason that this emendation has consequences for the numerical structure, which I only fathomed after my logotechnical analysis of the corrected text. The total number of words in the poem amount to 204 (12 x 17), with 85 (5 x 17) directly spoken to God, and 119 (7 x 17) spoken in God's presence about him.

Observations

1. In line with all psalms in Book III and Book IV so far (except Psalm 95), the meaningful centre of Psalm 102 is to be found in terms of its poetic structure, viz., v. 15, the middle verseline (29 = 14 + 1 + 14), coinciding with the two middle cola (60 = 29 + 2 + 29):

פִּירְצוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ אֶת־אֲבִנֶיהָ וְאֶת־עֲפָרָהּ יִהְיֶנוּ:

For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust.

The two pivotal words, וְאֶת־עֲפָרָה, 'and their dust', which can by no means be considered a meaningful centre, has a supporting function, being positioned within the pivotal verseline (204 = 101 + 2 + 101).

There may be a deliberately designed relation between the 29 verselines, the 29 cola surrounding the centre, and the fact that the meaningful centre is made up of 29 letters. Therefore, the word כְּבוֹדוֹ, 'his glory' (16b), may be regarded as a keyword, of which the numerical value (11 + 2 + 6 + 4 + 6 = 29) gives structure to the text.

2. What meets the eye immediately is that there is a conspicuous alternation in the direction of address. Canto I starts as a prayer in vs. 2-3, but vs. 4-10, the poet's reflection on his desperate situation, sounds more like a monologue; in v. 11, he suddenly addresses God directly. Finally, in v. 12, he switches back to the monologue. At the beginning of Canto II, in vs. 13-15, he addresses God directly, but in vs. 16-23 he returns to speaking *about* God. In Canto III he sets out speaking *about* God in v. 24, but in vs. 25-29, he once again addresses God directly. This final address is formally introduced by the word אֵינִי, 'I say' (v. 25a), which is of course part of the monologue.

In terms of word-count, we get the following striking picture:

vs. 2-3	words addressed to God	}	26	47
vs. 4-10	monologue			
v. 11	words addressed to God 51	}	6	6
v. 12	monologue			
vs. 13-15	words addressed to God	}	25	66
vs. 16-25:1 ^a	monologue			
vs. 25-29	words addressed to God 34			
vs. 2-29 the prayer as a whole			85 (5x17)	+ 119 (7x17) = 204.

Needless to say, this is the totally unexpected outcome resulting from the two corrections I carried out in vs. 16b and 25a.

3. Even more strikingly, the above compositional formula in terms of the direction of address, 204 = 85 + 119, reappears in the framework of the poem on canto level. The middle canto significantly stands out in terms of content and by its 85 (5 x 17) words.

Canto I (vs. 2-12) The lament: the poet is in dire straits	79
Canto II (vs. 13-23) Praise to God for the salvation of the city	85
Canto III (vs. 24-29) Appeal to God, based on his eternal presence	40
Total: 204 = 85 + 119.	

The inner coherence of Canto II is strongly buttressed by the 7 occurrences of the divine name, in combination with the 3 explicit references to God's *name* (13b, 16a, and 22a) and by the 2 references to his *glory*, which signify his presence (vs. 16b and 17b).

4. Though Canto II may give the impression of being a secondary insertion in an original poem, vs. 2-12 + 24-29, there is absolutely nothing substantiating such a supposition. The intricate numerical structure of the poem based on the forms of address disclaims any idea that the psalm is a collation. Moreover, the leading theme of God's eternal and unchanging presence, especially manifest in Canto II and III, strongly argues in favour of a carefully devised composition.
5. Apart from the impressive multiples of the divine name numbers already mentioned, they are also woven into the fabric of the text throughout the poem in a concatenated way. Though some of them may be a matter of chance, this cannot possibly apply to all:

vs. 6-8	17 words in total
vs. 5-9	32 = 15 + 17 (cf. vs. 16-19)
vs. 7-10	26 words in total
vs. 8-11	26 words in total
vs. 9-12	26 words in total
vs. 10-13	26 words in total
vs. 13-14	17 words in total
vs. 6-15	68 (4 x 17) words, with 34 before, and 34 after atnach
vs. 13-16	17 words after atnach
vs. 14-17	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 13-18	49 = 26 + 23 (cf. vs. 15-20)
vs. 16-19	32 = 17 + 15 (cf. vs. 5-9)
vs. 19-20	17 words in total
vs. 15-20	49 = 26 + 23 (cf. vs. 13-18)
vs. 15-23	68 (4 x 17) words in total
vs. 13-23	85 (5 x 17) words in total
vs. 20-25	17 words in total, and 34 words spoken about God
vs. 24-28	34 (2 x 17) words in total
vs. 25-28	17 words before atnach
vs. 25-29	34 (2 x 17) words spoken to God.

6. There are in total **7** instances of the name YHWH: **1** in Canto I (v. 1a) and **6** in Canto II (vs. 1a, 13a, 16a, 17a, 20b, 22b, and 23b). The one occurrence of YH is to be found in v. 19b, where it highlights the hopeful prospect of a future nation that shall praise God.

The heading of Psalm 102 is the only one in Book IV containing God's name. See the Introduction to [Book IV](#), Table XIII.

© 2008
 Dr. C.J. Labuschagne Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),
 Brinkhorst 44 University of Pretoria, South Africa
 9751 AT Haren (Gron) and
 The Netherlands Professor of Old Testament (retired),
labuschagne.cj@planet.nl University of Groningen, The Netherlands